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ABSTRACT

Intended for a largely European audience, this paper offers an overview of current definitions and goals of instructional communication and communication education teaching and research in the United States. The first major section of the paper looks at recent advances in instructional communication studies, concentrating on field research, behavioral alteration technique studies, studies dealing with instrumentation refinement, and studies concerned with treatment refinement. The second section of the paper reviews recent studies dealing with advances in communication education, focusing on the areas of identifying existing curricula and evaluating their appropriateness, basic research, and new curriculum material. The third section of the paper suggests future directions for research and application, and argues for the need to internationalize research efforts and for more work in the study of ethics as they apply to the teaching and practice of communication competencies. (The paper includes a four-page bibliography.) (FL)

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Instructional Communication/Education: Current Research Activities and Suggested Research Priorities

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Instructional Communication Education: Current Research Activities and Suggested Research Priorities

Abstract

Intended for a largely European audience, this paper presents an overview of current definitions and goals of instructional commnication and communication education teaching and research. Recent examples are given of the scholarship conducted in each of these areas, and encouragement is given to further pursuing these activities, internationalizing the scope of these pursuits, and making specific inroads in the study of ethics as they apply to the teaching and practice of communication competencies.

Instructional Communication/Education: Current Research Activities and Suggested Research Priorities.

While many interesting advances have been made in interpersonal, small group, organizational, intercultural, journalistic, and mass communication studies, and while no one could seriously doubt the importance of these enterprises, at least equally meaningful and impressive gains have been achieved in better learning how to achieve improved instruction through more appropriate communication (instructional communication) and of assessing more appropriately what it is that ought to be taught in communication curricula (communication education). Inasmuch as the central question to this conference is: "Can communication skills be taught?", it is appropriate that we attend to some of the excellent research done answering this question in the affirmative.

Instructional Communication: Recent Advances. In order to learn better how to communication instruction, actually, if you wiil, how to "do" instruction, research has been conducted on a variety of fronts. For instance:

Field Research. Marty-White and Staton-Spicer (1987) conducted a field study of two elementary school teachers teaching in gifted programs, programs intended for those students with known exceptional intellectual abilities. The results of this study, executed in the finest tradition of minimally obtrusive observational and descriptive research, contributes markedly to our understanding of how to use a variety of communication strategies

to effect optimal learning in a context not necessarily generalizable to others. The Marty-White and Staton-Spicer study is interesting in that it is one of an emerging genre of studies done in the field and which rely extensively on detailed descriptions of naturally occurring phenomena to advance our understanding of why certain communication behaviors and patterns work and others do not. We are beginning to witness an increase in such field studies, which add measurably to the validity of instructional communication theory (understandings of why certain ways of communicating with students is more effective than others) and how we might teach teachers to become more effective in the classroom.

Classic Experimentation: The Behavioral Alteration Technique Studies. In the classic experimental tradition a team of researchers have been executing a quite extensive line of research assessing effectiveness of various communication behaviors in altering (controlling) student behavior in the classroom. Noteable in these efforts has been the work of Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, and Richmond (1986), Plax, Kearney, and Tucker (1986), and Wheeless, Stewart, Kearney, and Plax (1987).

By surveying quite literally thousands of teachers and students, and at all different grade levels, inclusive of elementary through college instruction, these researchers have been able to create a typology of preferred communication styles, ones that they suspect result in improved (more positive) relationships between teachers and students. Further, through numerous experiments they

have been able to proffer tentative evidence in support of their mainstay proposition that minimal coercive power, coupled with frequent usage of highly positive and affective messages, increases learning, or at least increases the likelihood of students being disposed toward learning.

To be sure, this line of research is controversial. There are many of us in the field who dislike--what is, perhaps, very much an American notion--that to be good teachers we must also be good friends of our students. And the above research may point us in the direction of endorsing this controversial proposition. In any event,regardless of personal dispositions to the contrary, the behavioral alteration studies do, in fact, indicate (or at least suggest) a preferred orientation, and one that is certainly communication based. As such, this line of research is in the best tradition of basic research having real-world implications.

Instrumentation Refinement. Quite considerable of our effort is expended refining techniques and instrumentation for better giving communication instruction. For instance, Sorenson and Pickett (1986) have demonstrated that videotaping helps substantially in the teaching of interview skills. While videotaping has long been used in the teaching of public speaking and other public performance skills, it was not previously known whether this same device would have comparable gains for the teaching of interviewing. Sorenson and Pickett' research indicates that it does.

Neer (1986) developed an instrument for measuring students' "participation apprehension"; i.e., the extent to which students fear communicative participation in classroom settings. This contribution is interesting in that it attempts to explain why some students participate less in learning activities and, presumably, learn less as a result of this reduced participation. Further, and as discussed by Neer, by applying what is known about the larger construct of communication apprehension, it may be possible to help afflicted students become more participatory, more in control of their own learning.

On a more pedestrian level, Hawkins (1987) joins the efforts of others in proposing new and more appropriate testing procedures for evaluating learning of communication constructs and skills. Her arguement favors Latent Trait Modeling approaches toward learning assessment, and may well dispose many of her colleagues to substantially revamp their assessment (testing) activities.

Spitzberg and Hurt (1987), two particularly well known communicologists, devloped an "Interpersonal Skills Self-Assessment" instrument, useful in interpersonal communication courses for helping students identify specifically what it is they need do to become more interpersonally competent. This effort is typical of contributions undertaken by many communication educators, whose primary interest is in developing instrumentation that can be used in classroom (and other training settings) to facilitate learning. In a similar vain, for instance, Rubin and Roberts (1987) contrasted

three different listening tests, making specific observations of their methodological and conceptual strengths and weaknesses.

Treatment Refinement. In some areas of communication education, the knowledge of specific communication behavior is so extensive that there is a long history of efforts to bring about increased competency through various treatment programs, with systematic desensitization being, perhaps, the most widely known. These treatment approaches are constantly being challenged and refined through experimentation and conceptual refinement. In one such instance, Ayres and Hopf (1987) demonstrate visualization as an alternative, equally effective, less costly and cumbersome (in contrast with other known procedures) treatment of communication apprehension. This position is buttressed by theoretic work of others (Rossi & Todd-Mancillas, 1988) and might well result in a completely new approach toward teaching the apprehensive how to be less apprehensive and, therefore, more communicatively competent.

Summary. Concerning recent advances in instructional communication, it is apparant that activity has been, at once, deversified and deliberate in its intent to better learn how to improve instruction through more appropriate or effective communication. As such, this dimension of the field is vibrant and making viable contributions to the discipline.

Communication Education: Recent Advances. While instructional communication activities is predominately concerned with how

instruction is communicated, communication education is more concerned with what is taught and how its relevance is demonstrated. Examples follow.

Identifying Existing Curricula. One of the most common approaches in refining communication education is to simply identify as clearly as possible curricula offered on particular communication subjects. In so doing, one is able to offer state-of-the art recommendations for specific curricular offerings or obtain a basis for making constructive criticism of the status quo. Two such examples come to mind. Beebe and Biggers (1986) surveyed 387 communication departments throughout the United States to assess current approaches toward intercultural communication education. From this they were able to make specific recommendations concerning the preferred minimal curricular content of intercultural communication courses. When a similar survey is conducted at some time in the future, this base information will then serve as a valuable comparison point from which to assess progress made in the interim.

In a similar manner, Benoit and Follert (1986) surveyed graduate programs to assess the manner in which argumentation was taught. Inasmuch as recent years have found a resurgence in argumentation instruction, these authors wanted to determine whether one instructional paradigm seemed to predominate over others, with a view to discussing its philosophical and heuristic implications. As such, this effort is slightly different from Beebe and Biggers', in

that Benoit and Follert sought not so much to obtain information for the purpose of proposing state-of-the-art instruction, as much as to explore conceptually the disciplinary significance of argumentation studies as they are currently undertaken. The Beebe and Biggers study, then, describes state-of-the-art approaches in intercultural communication for the purposes of serving as a benchmark for preferred approaches toward instruction, while the Benoit and Follert study describes argumentation instruction for the purpose of raising fundamental philosophical questions. Two studies much alike in manner, quite different in purpose.

Evaluating Appropriateness of Existing Curriculum.

Similar to--but also quite different from--the above studies are those that in some way contrast what students have been taught with what they actually need know in order to succeed in the work place. Typical, of such evaluation studies is Johnson and Szczupakiewicz' (1987) comparison of public speaking skills taught in classrooms with alumni reports of the specific public speaking skills actually needed on the job. The differences were striking, and speak to a needed modification of public speaking curriculum, namely that it should be less formal in its requiring students to make one-to-many, behind-the-podium presentations, and more germane to the extemporaneous presentations commonly made by business people.

Funkhouser and Savage (1987) contrasted career expectations of broadcasting majors with more realistic expectations of potential supervisors, and learned that more so now than in the past students

harbor unrealistic and exaggerated expectations for professional advancement. Incorporating this information in the curriculum is important in preparing students for the patient, long, steady work performance that must be exhibited to achieve professional recognition and advance, which may be their possibility, but never their assurance. Such attitude adjustment is needed among many American students across a variety of majors, even among those less applied than broadcasting.

Basic Research. Of course, as with all disciplines basic research is needed to suggest theoretic content of instruction, even though subsequent research may invalidate initial claims. Basic research is one of the bedrocks of communication education, and is illustrated in the work of Duran and Zakahi (1987), which indicated that one's satisfaction with their own communication performance is better predicted by audience ratings of performance than one's own rating of performance. This suggests that in teaching interpersonal communication competence that one be more attuned to reading feedback from audiences than to their own ratings of their own performance.

In a correlational study, Miller (1987) found significant and negative correlations between increased reticence and decreased expectations for communication success, which would suggest that reticence impinges on communication success. Such would be expected, because expectations for success can be argued as preconditional to achieving success, or at least that there is a

positive correlational relationship between the two. However, this implication seems not to be verified by the research of others (Behnke, Sawyer, & King, 1987; Burgoon, Pfau, Birk, & Manusov, 1987), which indicates that increased reticence is not perceived by audience members as detracting from communication performance. In fact, the Burgoon et al. research seems to indicate that unsophisticated (nonexpert) audiences are unable to assess accurately whether, in fact, a communicator is appreciably reticent. Thus, the relationship between reticence and communication competency appears unsettled, and warrants further basic research to help resolve these and other discrepancies.

Other basic research has been focused on attempting to better understand how people learn to communicate with others. Siltanen (1986), for instance, conducted a quite interesting study attempting to determine at what ages people first begin to understand simple versus more complicated metaphors. Her work indicates that it is not until age 12 that people develop comfort working with the more complicated metaphors, and this finding, when replicated, will figure into discussions of how to best communicate with (teach) younger and older grade levels.

Suggesting New Curriculum Material. As with instructional communication research, much field research is done determining needed additions to communication curriculum. Shadden and Raiford (1986), for instance, surveyed elderly persons to determine what their predominant comunication needs were. On the

basis of this information recommendations were made for developing communication curricula specifically appropriate for the elderly. In a similar manner, Honeycutt and Worobey (1987) surveyed nurses to determine specific communication skills most needed to ensure success in their profession. They determined that to be most successful, listening skills predominated in their importance across all manner of "nurse-other" interactions and that conflict resolution skills predominated in nurse-hospital staff interactions. Honeycutt and Worobey, as did Shadden and Raiford, distilled from their survey findings suggesting specific improvements in communication curricula.

Summary. The above research would indicate, as did that research summarized for instructional communication, that communication education is a diversified field, that contributors venture in making applied as well as basic contributions, and that taken together, instructional communication and communication education enterprises contribute significantly to our learning better how to teach communication.

Future Directions

At base, there are two directions for future research and application, which this writer thinks to be of paramount importance and of special relevance to the audience gathered here today.

First, it is imperative--absolutely imperative--that instructional and communication education research be internationalized. In reviewing the literature in the field one is struck by the dearth of

contributions made to American journals by European and other continents' scholars. To some extent the World Communication Association is filling this void, but largely—if not exclusively—by soliciting contributions from Asian scholars. European voices have yet to be heard by way of our most widely read and influential publications, including the publication from which nearly all the above research was taken, Communication Education.

At a time when we are ever becoming increasingly more interdependent, when quite significant contributions are being made all over the world to a discipline so essential to the furtherence of all our essential objectives, it is unfortunate that our research activities take on so insular a posture. At the very least one would encourage cross-cultural research by organizing international research teams to investigate phenomena of common press and moment. This would constitute interesting, clearly worthwhile research and would certainly broaden the validity claims for much of our theory and instructional practices.

A second area which must be addressed, and in this manner European scholars can, owing to their intellectual history and tradition, make especially noteworthy contributions, is in the area of "communication ethics." For the most part, American scholarship has been fixed on two objectives: improving instructional communication; i.e., learning how to better communicate with (teach) students and communication education; i.e., curricula on the skills and knowledge requisite to competent communication performance.

In addition to our learning better "how" and "what" to teach, it is at least equally important to consider in what circumstances and for what reasons one "should" communicate in designated ways. This latter point is missing nearly entirely from contemporary approaches toward American education, although steps are being taken in the right direction (note, for instance, Sissela Bok's Lying (1979) and Secrets (1982)). One of my greatest concerns is that we may well be helping an entire generation of students to presume the unimportance of asking fundamentally important questions about the rightness or wrongness of given communication strategies. If I were to beseech the European communication community to do any one thing, it would be to not lose sight of the need to encourage among their students extensive and thorough discussion of the ethical implications of their communication. In communication studies the opportunity to venture these discussions is ever apparent. Once titillated, students are wont to discuss at length a variety of personal and historical events calling to interesting play one or another moral principle. Students are ready and eager forsuch dialogue. Their teachers need only be aware and willing to provide focused and supportive forum for such discussion.

In the United States, efforts are now being made in this direction. The Speech Commication Association, the largest Amercian national association of communication teachers and researchers, now sponsors "The Ethics Commission," a commission specifically attuned to ethics in instruction, research, and theory development. Jaksa

and Pritchard (1988) have just completed a quite excellent book on Communication ethics. In fact, their book is entitled, Ethics in Communication. This is the first new book in many years to be written on the subject and will do much to further instruction and research on communication ethics. So it is not as though the field is oblivious to the need to increase its attention to ethics instruction and research, but rather that such attention is coming much later than what would have been optimal. European scholars, perhaps because they have as a whole always been somewhat closer to the origins of ethics philosphy, have never really been very far a field of such considerations and are, therefore, in excellent position to contribute significantly to thinking in this area. Accordingly, I further encourage their activism in ethics and communication teaching and research.

Conclusion

In summary, this paper has sought to define instructional communication and communication education studies as they are conventionally understood and practiced in the United States. While in no sense intending to be exhaustive of the research done in the fields of speech and communication, the studies discussed herein are nonetheless representative of the different types of research undertaken and indicative of the manner of contributions made thereby.

While pride can be taken in the accomplishments made in these fields of inquiry--subdisciplines, actually--they obviously need to

be made more extensive by internationalizing the scope of inquiry and developing more understanding of the ethics or morality of various communication behaviors and patterns. In both these respects, the European community of teachers and scholars can make significant contributions, and it is petitioned herein that they do so.

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